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HERMANN KLAATSCH

By BRUNO OETTEKING

HERMANN KLAATSCH, professor of anatomy and (physical) anthropology at the University of Breslau, died unexpectedly on the fifth of January, 1916. In him science loses a highly gifted representative and teacher, and those who have had closer intercourse with him an amiable personality and friend.

Klaatsch was a man who perceived with rare acuteness the meaning and object of the science of (physical) anthropology, and impressed on many of its phases the stamp of his personality. His talents found early recognition and stimulation by his family. He was born on the tenth of March, 1863, the son of a prominent physician in the city of Berlin. From a boy he showed pronounced interest in natural sciences and a lively zeal for collecting specimens. He graduated from the Royal Wilhelms-Gymnasium of his native city in March, 1881, and took up the study of medicine at Heidelberg. Here it was Gegenbaur who especially attracted him and it was to him that he became indebted for his comprehensive knowledge of descriptive and comparative anatomy. Between the university years at Heidelberg and his later courses at Berlin he spent some months of zealous study at the biological station of Villefranche near Nice. He spent his year of military service in Berlin. Here also he worked for a longer term at the Rudolf Virchow laboratory and at the Augusta hospital, and in 1885 became scientific assistant at the anatomical institute under Waldeyer. His promotion to the degree of doctor of medicine took place in 1885-86, and during this period he also passed the prescribed state examinations.

A new phase in Klaatsch's scientific activity began in 1888, when Gegenbaur invited him to come to Heidelberg. Here he began his academic teaching in 1890 and became a professor extraordinarius in 1895. During the years 1904-1907 he made his trip

to Australia to investigate the aborigines there and stopped for a short sojourn on the island of Java. After his return he accepted a call to the University of Breslau, where he taught anatomy and anthropology, undertaking in 1912 also a course in topographic anatomy. The reorganization of the anthropological and ethnological collections is also due to his endeavors. Besides his professorship at the University, Klaatsch held several honorary offices, academic and governmental, and his government honored him by bestowing upon him several orders.

Klaatsch's scientific work can clearly be divided into two periods, the line of demarcation being drawn about 1899. During the first he was chiefly interested in descriptive and comparative anatomical work, in which he gave valuable stimulation more particularly to comparative organography. As a logical sequel to this work he turned to the study of man.¹ This second period sets in with a treatise on: *Die Stellung des Menschen in der Reihe der Säugetiere, speziell der Primaten und der Modus seiner Herausbildung aus einer niederen Form.*² In this paper was already prefigured the course of all his later research. And from now on his studies were directed to primitive Hominidae in consideration of the importance of the problem of the evolution of form. Simultaneously with this transformation the discussion of the Neandertal question had reached its climax. Independently of each other, G. Schwalbe spoke about the skull of this fossil at the congress of anatomists at Bonn (1901), and Klaatsch discussed the limbs. His occupation with paleolithic man found its expression in numerous meritorious treatises. It became almost a necessity for him to study in their native habitat the aborigines of Australia, who manifestly had remained at a primitive stage of culture and development due to their geographical isolation. He therefore undertook in 1904-1907 his extended Australian exploration trip with the material aid of the Royal Prussian Academy of Sciences at Berlin. The harvest of new facts, reported in a series of papers, was extra-

¹ A list of Klaatsch's more important works containing 81 different items may be found in an article by Rich. N. Wegner, *Anatomischer Anzeiger*, 1916, Vol. 48, Nos. 23-24, pp. 619-623.

² *Globus*, 1899, Vol. 76, No. 21, pp. 329-332; No. 22, pp. 354-357.

ordinarily rich. The demonstration of pre-neandertaloid traits in the skull and skeleton of the Australian native was probably of greatest importance. Two papers of special value treating of these finds might be mentioned here: "Das Gesichtsskelet der Neandertalrasse und der Australier," 1908, *Verhandlungen der anatomischen Gesellschaft*, Vol. 22, pp. 1-51, and: "The Skull of the Australian Aboriginal," 1908, *Report Pathological Laboratory Lunacy Dept.*, Sidney, pp. 3-167. The Australian studies gave rise to a reform of his anthropological methods, adopted henceforth in all of his investigations. They are treated systematically in his work on: "Kranio-Morphologie und Kranio-Trigonometrie," 1909 *Archiv Anthropol.*, Vol. 7, No. 5, pp. 1-28. We also find them employed in the highly valued work on the Heidelberg lower jaw by its discoverer O. Schoetensack, the completion of which was greatly aided by Klaatsch's inspiring help. As a significant period in his research work follows now the unearthing and description (with O. Hauser) of the skeletal remains in southern France (1909-1910), which became generally known as *Homo mousteriensis hauseri*, and *Homo aurignacensis hauseri*. Quite a number of other investigations of old finds were recorded in the latter years of his life, during which he also produced papers which directly touched the domain of ethnology, e. g. *Die Anfänge von Kunst und Religion in der Urmenschheit*, Leipzig, 1913.

The distinctive feature of Klaatsch's scientific mission lies in his clear conception of the problems underlying and of fundamental bearing on human evolution. He tried to solve them in a way sometimes subjective and markedly original, in a way that inconsiderately shelved skepticism and doubt. As to the problem of evolution he applied the lever directly at the root, resolving the complex of closely related forms into radiating lines of special development. Klaatsch's anthropological research work was based on the most admirable insight into the nature of comparative anatomy. But besides this basis, so indispensable for anthropological research work, he was endowed with rare gifts, of which his morphological discrimination and the synthetic comprehension of morphological traits in a phylogenetic sense, were most pronounced. Klaatsch also was one of the first to advocate energetically a clear

division of religion and science. This involved taking a position against Virchow and Ranke, and revealed the firmness of his convictions. It may sometimes be difficult for us in this generation to realize that a conception of anthropology raising it to the level of an academic science dates back not even a generation, and is due to spirits of Klaatsch's type. It was a treat to listen to him when he developed his ideas in substantially built-up sentences and with his peculiarly spirited delivery. Since 1897 hardly one of the yearly congresses of anthropologists or anatomists passed at which Klaatsch did not speak. In numberless discussions he stood his ground in his decisive way of argumentation that never swayed from scientific principles. Still it was characteristic of his individuality that he later modified a keenly formulated hypothesis. If this demonstrates a critical intelligence in proportion to the importance of the subject, we have to be thankful to his initiative on the other hand for many a fundamental gain in knowledge. Klaatsch was one of those who championed the almost complete exclusion of statistical calculations, deriving his results directly from organic observations. The following approaches a scientific confession of faith, which he adhered to in all his works:—

Without a true knowledge of the morphology of *prosimiae* and *simiae* all descriptive picturings of human varieties and racial differences remain only dead material. . . . It is indeed not my intention to undervalue strictly metrical methods, but I believe that their value would acquire considerably more importance, if all such anthropometric investigations should be subordinated to the viewpoints of comparative anatomy. (Translation from *Globus*, 1899, Vol. 76, p. 355.)

Such procedure is surely responsible for the wealth of morphological details described in his writings.

Klaatsch's was an open-minded, amiable character. Whoever had the privilege of being in touch with him for a longer or shorter period is able to appreciate his inexhaustible kindness in helping and advising associates and disciples. His scientific domain resembled a well-cultivated field teeming with produce. As a human being he was free from pose and artificiality. In this obituary the present writer wishes to express his heartfelt indebtedness to both his scientific and personal character.

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